



A Portrayal of Soldiers at War in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *The Red Badge of Courage* through Two Contradictory Concepts of Escapism and Heroism

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Abstract— The research focuses on depicting the life of two pivotal soldiers struggling to cope with the stress and horrors of war in terms of escapism and heroism which ensues from a comparative approach between Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Stephen Crane *The Red Badge of Courage*. The paper attempts to show how the main character, Billy Pilgrim, in *Slaughterhouse-Five* grapples while experiencing war incompetently and unpreparedly to ultimately discover his comfort zone through mental diversion from unpleasant aspects of his daily life instead of performing his duty to triumph over the enemy. Whereas in *The Red Badge of Courage*, the protagonist, Henry Fleming who is enlisted in the military service with his determination and heroic ambition tackles and escapes while seeking courage to fight in the battlefield in order to maintain a good reputation as a duty-bound, fearless and confident soldier. Furthermore, through the close-reading of key scenes and by relying on a thorough analysis of war experiences of the two protagonists in the addressed books, the characters' aspirational endeavors, and the authors' non-identical views of the war come to surface as they portray a soldier-like personality, one with idealized notions of glory and heroism whereas the other one representing the senselessness of war. The contrasting reactions of the two central characters towards the war offer stimulating areas for discussion and arouse controversial opinions about the behavior of the presuming war heroes and escapists and how they are attained. As a result of the characters' dissimilar preferences in shaping their outer and inner personality in public and private life, the research demonstrates how they endeavour desperately to achieve this aim by feeding their brains with different ingredients. Billy, on the one hand, chooses to fight the pointless battle with his own imagination to ease his mind from the harsh reality, and on the other hand, Fleming tortures his mind with his heroic thoughts to win the battle while suffering from an internal conflict.



Keywords— *Escape, Escapism, Heroism, Hero, Soldiers, Wars*

I. INTRODUCTION

In literary studies, writers have studied the damaging effects of war and how it shapes post-conflict lives for centuries. The hardship, violence, and psychological stress that come with war are considered both a backdrop and a driving force in literature, leaving a great impact on the plots, character growth, and theme exploration of numerous works. Not only is a political or historical matter investigated in war literature, but also a profoundly human experience that affects individual lives, communities, and even the entire

society. War in literature is represented as tool that sheds light on human condition, highlighting the emotional, social, and moral consequences of battle.

Literary representations of the battlefield frequently challenge conventional notions of bravery, dignity, and sacrifice. Many works challenge the idea that waging a war is a noble or heroic effort by exposing the psychological damage resulting from the violence and moral concessions of war. Characters could struggle with their concept of heroism or moral conundrums that challenge the validity of

the cause they are defending. Broadly speaking, heroism is the quality of becoming a hero that is, of deeds of bravery, self-sacrifice, moral purity, and courage against hardship, danger, or challenge.

Correspondingly, one of the most important pieces of American literature that explores the idea of heroism in the setting of war is Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). The protagonist of the book is Henry Fleming, a young soldier in the American Civil War who at first idealizes bravery and honor before undergoing a dramatic metamorphosis in the face of the harsh reality of combat. Heroism is portrayed in this story as something filled with uncertainty, terror, and self-discovery, rather than a simple, idealized ideal. Crane questions traditional concepts of heroism, demonstrating that true courage frequently arises in the midst of weakness, fear, and personal conflict. Hence, the story depicts Henry's internal conflict as he struggles with his desire for greatness and his dread of cowardice.

At first glance, heroism and war may appear to be mutually exclusive concepts, particularly in classic depictions in which soldiers are hailed as heroes for their bravery, sacrifice, and dedication to the common good as reflected in the character of Henry Fleming. However, when investigated logically, battle frequently exposes the ridiculousness of these noble ideals. Instead of validating lofty and virtuous principles, war frequently destroys them, exposing the arbitrary nature of death, the futility of conflict, and the moral compromises that come with violence. The idea that war is pointless and ridiculous is a common theme in a lot of war literature, with writers emphasizing the illogical, irrational, and ineffective character of combat such as the character of Billy Pilgrim in which Vonnegut draws his traits with careful details to defend this point. Authors frequently use these works to highlight the psychological, moral, and emotional upheaval that troops and civilizations face as a result of war. War is shown as a fundamentally nonsensical phenomena because it is based on concepts that violate human logic and reason, heroes are frequently exposed as victims, and the noble ideals that drive conflict are revealed to be false or even destructive.

Slaughterhouse-Five (1969) serves as an example of the absurdity and futility of wars. Kurt Vonnegut, who is regarded as one of the most renowned and popular writers of the post-modern era in the American literature, particularly during World War II, through his main character, Billy Pilgrim, criticizes the exaltation of war and how it warps human ideals and reality. The novel is a classic piece of war fiction, capturing the irrationality of war in both structure and subject. It is a nonlinear, fragmentary story that combines wartime reality with science fiction

elements to create a bizarre and absurdist depiction of Dresden's bombing during World War II. In his novel, the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, is intentionally given features of anti-heroism; he is an unanticipated hero, a man who is not particularly brave, powerful, or moral in the traditional definition of a hero. He is a fragile, passive figure who appears to be at the whim of events beyond his control, such as time travel, extraterrestrial abduction, and the horrors of war itself. As he practices escapism to embark on an illusionary journey in order to escape his duty as a soldier, the writer sheds more light on the irrationality of war and the inherent meaninglessness and chaos of battle.

Both novels, Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, revolve around warfare issues and a soldier's struggle while experiencing the war. The characters' developmental journey begin as they get involved in the seriousness of the situation they are in. Tuchman (1992) in *The Guns of August* states that "in the midst of war and crisis nothing is as clear or as certain as it appears in hindsight" (p. 485). Despite the fact that both novels differ widely in the narration style as *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a postmodern novel and thus narrated in a fragmented and non-chronological style, whereas *The Red Badge of Courage* is a realistic novel which uses a linear, straightforward and realistic storytelling technique, both share themes of war, trauma, and the dehumanizing effects of conflict. Schaefer (2006) in his *Heroes Had No Shame in Their Lives* states that "when we read *The Red Badge of Courage* in the light of this story and vice versa Crane confronts us with not one but at least four mysteries of heroism" (p. 111). In different circumstances, Josh Simpson (2015) points out that "war psychologically wounds Billy Pilgrim . . . the ideas contained in Kilgore Trout's science fiction novels are, ultimately, responsible for his complete divorce from reality" (267). He agrees that Tralfamadorians are created by Billy as an escape mechanism using science fiction novels as his influence.

By portraying soldiers fighting in the setting of war, writers essentially draw their thematic notions that make their work exceptional and unique compared to other literary works covering the same overall issue. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy Pilgrim faces some severe internal conflicts due to compulsory fights and deaths in pointless and insensible wars. As a result, he utilizes his fertile imagination to escape from the battlefields and the pressures of the war to an illusionary place called Tralfamadore's Planet. This adventurous attempt places Billy in a comfortable, yet illusionary, spot away from the bitterness of wars. On the contrary, Crane uses his main character to struggle in fear while approaching courage and dignity to fight powerfully and proudly in the war with the

other soldiers. Henry's evolutionary stages from a fearful and unskilled soldier to a brave and lionhearted soldier place him into the shape of a perfect and heroic warfighter.

This study deals with the contradictory reactions of these soldiers towards the war and the authors' physical and mental description of these soldiers as they fight the battle with different ambitions. Vonnegut and Crane force their characters to practice different techniques in order to maintain their goals. These contrasting techniques put the characters into a state of mind that pushes them towards practicing escapism and heroism as a mechanism to live and defend themselves; this also serves as the main aim of this study. General aspects of the soldiers' lives are excluded in the analysis of some relevant scenes that support the field of study. The data collection process relies on direct quotations and indirect analysis of the primary text of the two novels, as well as the secondary sources that directly support this view. The significance of this work arises as the description of war and depiction of soldiers delve into higher and diverse directions pertaining to the realm of escapist and heroes as presented by different authors of different times and circumstances.

War literature reflects soldiers' varied, often contradicting experiences. It reveals the terrible realities of war, including pain, absurdity, and moral ambiguity, while also delving into themes of heroism, sacrifice, and fraternity. Through these experiences, literature attempts to convey an awareness of the psychological and emotional toll that war has on individuals, demonstrating the devastating effects that warfare inflicts on soldiers' bodies, minds, and spirits.

II. PRACTICABILITY OF ESCAPISM IN SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE: A SOLDIER AS AN ESCAPIST

Escapism is a phenomenon that is recognized by sociologists, psychologists, and philosophers, as well as by artists, due to its prevalence in the visual arts, literature, and the film industry. It pertains to an emotional response that people employ to deal with stressful, challenging, or overwhelming events. It can be generally seen as an activity that helps the utilizer to avoid and escape the unpleasant effects and the bitterness of life through engaging in either fertile imagination or entertainment. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). While escapism might provide the utilizer an immediate refuge, it is frequently used to escape from actual-world issues or emotions rather than confront and solve them directly. Brenner (1971) in his study examines escapism from a psychoanalytic standpoint, specifically how people employ escapist practices to shield themselves from painful emotional experiences and conflict. He portrays escapism as a helpful technique for defending

oneself against anxiety and trauma. Whereas Woolf (2014) in a study titled *Escapism in Psychological Health: A Meta-Analytic Review of the Literature* looks into the psychological processes that underlie escapism, how it helps people deal with stress, and how it can have both beneficial and detrimental psychological effects.

The practicality of escapism in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a significant component of the protagonist Billy Pilgrim's experience with war and trauma. Escapism, in the form of time travel and mental detachment, is important in Billy's ability to cope with the horrors of war and the moral absurdities that accompany them as time travel in the story "is not just a narrative device; it symbolizes the disorientation and senselessness of war, where the human body, like Billy's, becomes fragmented, disconnected, and subject to forces outside of its control" (Smith, 2008, p. 94). In the setting of the story, escapism serves as both a coping technique and a profound remark on the futility of warfare. This idea broadens as Vonnegut shapes Billy's physical appearance in a "preposterous" way which contrasts sharply with traditional war imagery of soldiers. He is given the shape of Coca-Cola bottle with "a chest and shoulders like a box of kitchen matches" who had "no helmet, no overcoat, no weapon and no boots." (Vonnegut, 1972, p. 18). Vonnegut usually blends elements of humor with absurdity to criticize the horrors of war, creating a soldier who is unable to undergo a quarrel serves as "a tool to highlight the absurdity of violence and war" and the necessity of escapism. (Miller, 2005, p. 67). Billy was forced against his will to become a soldier in the Second World War after graduating from Ilium High School and is often described by the narrator to be a weak, hilarious, passive, and unconventional character for war. He indicates that Billy "didn't look like a soldier at all. He looked like a filthy flamingo . . . He was powerless to harm the enemy or to help his friends". (p. 18). These traits describe Billy's position and determination in the story.

Billy is initially taken as a soldier to fight the enemy with the American army, but soon after he becomes a German prisoner during the famous Battle of the Bulge with the other American POWs where he suffers a lot before his discharge from the army. His father also passes away in a hunting accident while the war is still on-going. During the war, he doesn't challenge any situation but instead adapts himself into them. He does not have the wish of performing the role of the soldier who wills to surpass the others so as to become a war hero. The challenges of the war do not take any part in Billy's life no matter how challenging it grows; the signs of a warrior fail to be presented in him as he is always "empty-handed, bleakly ready for death" (p. 18).

Under these circumstances, Billy Pilgrim, is engaged in visionary activities to escape the bitterness of the war rather than confronting it as he is enlisted against his will to participate in war issues in the first place. The only way to escape his awful and mandatory reality is by using his fertile imagination. Once he realizes that he is impotent to stop or change the mystifying wars which is basically causing much destruction to the world and its inhabitants, he decides to use his creative and illusionary ways to escape the terrible and pointless yet realistic life that he is in. Billy suddenly finds himself unstuck in time during the war when he is still serving as an American soldier, this allows him to mentally escape his awful events. Literary scholars have also regarded Billy's time travel as a coping mechanism that permits him to flee the horror of the bombing of Dresden and the meaninglessness of war. (Lennon, 2012). His time travel makes it possible for him to return to periods of relative safety and serenity, such as his time as an optometrist or even his alien abduction by the Tralfamadorians, in which time is considered as unchangeable and fixed. Later on, he pays random visits to Tralfamadore's planet and finds his convenience there away from the earthlings. (Yazdizadeh, 2017)

Thereafter, Billy encounters the planet's inhabitants and discovers a contingent pacifism on it when he runs from the terrifying, unpleasant views and cruelty of the war. As soon as he familiarizes himself with the Tralfamadorians' wise commitments and perceives the horrifying and outrageous actions of human beings, he begins seeking pacifism through means of escapism in preparation for living in peace. He confesses his feelings of disappointment in earthly beings to the Tralfamadorians soon after he realizes how devastating wars can be as he recalls the moment he saw "the boiled bodies in Dresden" and says:

I have lit my way in a prison at night with candles from the fat of human beings who were butchered by the brothers and fathers of those school girls who were boiled. Earthlings must be the terrors of the Universe! If other planets aren't now in danger from Earth, they soon will be. So, tell me the secret so I can take it back to Earth and save us all: How can a planet live at peace? (P. 55)

This is where Billy comes to realization that the planet earth with its disastrous and chaotic wars is the main reason behind losing the planet's essential peace; hence, he moves to a more peaceful and surreal world without considering the consequences of deserting the battlefield since the withdrawal is achieved by means of creative and inventive imagination. Wars are degraded in Vonnegut's novel which displays the concept of Heroism as a non-crucial behaviour

that does not arouse Billy's aspiration towards achieving the goal of being a hero character. (Tang, 2011). For him to live peacefully without taking into account any pressures that exist in the world is to "ignore the awful times", the undesirable and unendurable events in his life and alternatively to "concentrate on the good ones." (P. 55). Ignorance is the key factor for Billy to live in peace which is part of Tralfamadorians' philosophy of life that Billy must follow.

Instead of fighting in the war against the intended enemy and struggling with the outside world for nonsense reasons, he chooses to abandon the area that causes him discomfort and seek peace by engaging himself consistently in the practices of escapism. This idea is illustrated when Billy, the portrait of anti-war and anti-hero soldier, confronts one of the Tralfamadorians with ideas of a planet living at peace and requests to have a similar ideology on earth; however, the Tralfamadorians "don't want to change anything. They are content with how things are, seeing everything as inevitable. And so it goes." (P. 29). Finally Billy comes to the unsettling revelation that war, bloodshed and death are not only unavoidable, but also necessary components of their worldview. The Tralfamadorians, who have a radically different perspective of time and existence, reject the notion of peace in the ordinary sense that Billy may want for. They describe death "as another moment of the past that can be viewed eternally" (P. 27).

The phrase "So it goes" appears frequently in the novel making it one of the book's most recognizable phrases. It reflects the absurdity and unpredictability of life and war and is used to express a sort of resigned acceptance of tragedy and death. Whenever a death is stated, whether it be the death of a character, a soldier, or a civilian, the term is used. During Billy's stay on Tralfamadore's planet, he learns new ideologies and embraces them broadly especially when he admits to the fact that "the idea of preventing war on Earth is stupid" (P. 55) to expose his relinquishment to reality and acceptance of the inevitable death. He accepts the fatal wars and realizes that combats and deaths are inevitable, that's to say there will always be antagonism and hostility no matter how peaceful a world is, however; being acquainted with Tralfamadorian's philosophy of life and death is what is being valued in the story. Billy thinks it is important to describe and share with other people the incredibility of what he has seen and experienced on the other planet which does not exist among earthlings who are busy with war and war matters; thus, he decides to write letters for news. In his second letters, he writes that:

The most important thing I learned on Tralfamadore was that when a person dies, he only appears to die. He is still

very much alive in the past . . . All moments, past, present and future, always have existed, always will exist . . . It is just an illusion we have here on Earth that one moment follows another one, like beads on a string, and that once a moment is gone it is gone forever. (P. 16)

Billy successfully applies their theoretical philosophy and methodology to his life which defines his further attitude towards the war and the natural notion of death to the extent that he is persistent to pass the positive effects in which he has received from the other planet to earthlings. He is informed that the concept of free will which has an essential impact on planet earth does not take any role in the lives of human beings for its nonexistence in reality.

In fact, Vonnegut's attitude concerning a heroic portrait of his soldier character, specifically, and wars, generally, is further made clear when he tells Mary O'Hare, to whom the book is dedicated, that the book will not concentrate on heroes of the war and promises her that "there won't be a part for Frank Sinatra or John Wayne. 'I [Vonnegut] tell you what,' I said, 'I'll call it *The Children's Crusade*.'" (P. 11). Rather than glorifying wars and addressing heroes, he prefers to draw a character who flees from the war in order to emphasize a child-like innocence of soldiers.

III. PRACTICABILITY OF HEROISM IN *THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE*: A SOLDIER AS A HERO

Heroism is a multifaceted notion that has been investigated and defined in several ways throughout history and across cultures. In general, heroism is defined as the act of demonstrating extraordinary courage, heroic conduct, or selflessness in the face of danger or misfortune. It refers to people who go above and beyond to display strength, sacrifice, or moral superiority for the benefit of others or a greater cause. Heroism can be personal or collective, and it usually involves deeds that challenge or transcend the status quo. (Wehmeier, 2005). Heroism in literature has evolved dramatically throughout time, from the epic hero of ancient writings to the anti-heroes of postmodern literature. Heroism in literary depictions frequently reflects the beliefs and aspirations of the time in which the work was created, evolving in response to changing cultural, moral, and philosophical perspectives. With the passage of time, literature saw more complicated protagonists, who were frequently flawed and morally ambiguous. These heroes are usually defined by internal conflicts, existential challenges, and psychological complexity. Fisher (2011) in his work on the tragic hero demonstrates that heroism is frequently characterized by a complicated interplay of fate, choice, and

ethical struggle. He contends that a hero must be ethically competent while being susceptible to defects and human limitations, which will inevitably lead to his or her downfall

The Red Badge of Courage examines heroism through the protagonist, Henry Fleming, whose internal conflicts and personal maturation call into question traditional assumptions of what it means to be a hero in the setting of war. Rather than focusing on a physical or external exhibition of heroism, Crane stresses Henry's psychological and moral battles, finally reframing heroism as an individual's interior encounter with fear, humiliation, and self-doubt in the midst of war. Crane neglects all the aspects of Escapism in the *The Red Badge of Courage* so as to maintain a character suitable for accomplishing and achieving the concept of Heroism. He intentionally comprises the temporal escape in the character of Fleming to build the initial heroic stage and self-discovery. It is practiced for a specific period of time when he faces the reality of battle, he escapes from his duty in fear of showing cowardice and disappointment to his mother and his country in general. Later this initial desire for heroism quickly turns to fear, confusion, and journey. Fleming's self-discovery is, in Hart's conception, a state of leadership, of heroism. He points out that in this particular myth, the hero must experience three stages: separation, initiation and return in which Fleming successfully completes the cycle as he undergoes these steps in the war. (1953).

Fleming struggles as he overthinks for days ahead before he gets into a serious combat. He meets war veterans and passes by questionable moments which leave him with thoughts of courage, shame, and his abilities of facing the war fearlessly. In his solitude, Fleming "was confronted with a thing of moment. It had suddenly appeared to him that perhaps in a battle he might run. He was forced to admit that as far as war was concerned he knew nothing of himself" (Crane, 2018, P. 8). He considers the gap between his expectations of heroism and the realities of battle, he even questions himself about whether or not he is capable of holding to his position and never running from the combat again. Susan S. Karp opposes that "Henry's fear is not merely a personal failing, but a universal experience for soldiers, especially in war, where heroism is often out of reach and replaced by survival instincts" (Karp, 2000). These internal conflicts are the major reasons which incessantly drive Henry to commit the first act of escape. At first, "he ran like a rabbit" (P. 40), not because he finds wars meaningless or terrible, but it is because of his overreaction towards his ambitious thoughts of heroism that lead to his withdrawal from the glorifying war in which he observes. It is highlighted in the story that "a little panic-fear grew in his mind. As his imagination went forward to a fight, he saw hideous possibilities . . . He recalled his visions of broken-

bladed glory" (P. 8), which affects his internal psychology as he continues to get trapped in his abstract thoughts.

Fleming's withdrawal from the war does not last till the end of the story, but rather he comes back on track stronger after overcoming his prolonged internal conflicts which evoke from his heroic ambitions more than that of the consequences of deserting a battlefield. McConnell contends that Henry's return to the combat zone denotes "his moral regeneration, as he has moved beyond the shame of his earlier flight and faced the harsh realities of war head-on" (1999). He also asserts that Heroism is portrayed as a personal and internal conflict rather than an external one, in which true courage stems not from mindless valor but from the ability to act in the face of fear and accept moral responsibility.

Crane's realistic portrayal of his main character Henry Fleming is highly influenced by multiple psychological and social factors that lead to a journey of becoming a war hero as people of Crane's time admired heroism and wished to be part of the war for the sake of earning the glory reserved for great warriors. In a part Crane describes his character and his passion towards becoming a soldier serving in the army, he asserts that Fleming "had burned several times to enlist. Tales of great movements shook the land. They might not be distinctly Homeric, but there seemed to be much glory in them" (P. 2). For the sake of identical reasons Fleming decides to enlist in the Civil War in the Union Army for self-centered reasons of glory and heroism.

Moreover, additional discussions are evoked while considering Fleming's return to the battlefield after running away in terror and fear of getting killed. Before fleeing the combat, Fleming recognizes his flaw as a beginner warrior and grapples while thinking about his failure before his foe. Afterwards, his mental thoughts slowly begin to take an action in the real world as he tries to be a man that he has longed desired for. To his surprise, he discovers that he was no longer "afraid", he struggled with terror "but it had been replaced by a sort of calm, as though he had finally admitted to himself that there was no escape from the battle, no way to avoid what was happening." (P. 139). The failure that Henry encounters in the first battle leaves him in other more serious issues for he endures various physical and mental agonies as a result of his negative thoughts that start to increase and develop as he walks back to the regiment. The biggest fear of Fleming is not only confronting the enemy anymore, but it is "the burning desire to not be seen as a coward." (P. 72), it is the revelation and confrontation of his cowardice embedded in the list of his fears which block his way to become a hero. (Schaefer 2006).

Henry's transformation and his return to the battlefield might indicate either his eagerness to prove himself as a warrior so as to defeat his doubts and foes altogether for they are meant to be the motives for his escape from the war and by this he "had revenged [himself] upon [his] misgivings and upon the foe" (P. 120), or the coming back might stand for considering the consequences and punishment of deserting a battlefield. McConnell (1999) states that Henry's performance of heroism is about resilience and personal growth as he returns to the battlefield at the end of his transformation, his deeds exhibit a more subdued kind of heroism even though they are not characterized by conventional acts of courage. Henry acts out of duty and tries to support his regiment's communal effort rather than pursuing fame or personal recognition. His bravery is now motivated by the understanding that survival and accountability are necessary for heroism rather than by romanticized notions of honor.

As the character of Fleming matures through his involvement in phases of psychological and social struggles, his portrait of a young soldier undergoes many changes and developments. Starting with his "self-pride" which "was now entirely restored. In the shade of its flourishing growth he [stands] with braced and self-confident legs" (P. 91). Acting with honor in war and becoming a war hero were dreams commonly held by him to the extent that he seemed to be evidently ready to put himself at risk at any cost, there were times when Fleming "regarded the wounded soldiers in an envious way. He conceived persons with torn bodies to be peculiarly happy. He wished that he, too, had a wound, a red badge of courage" (P. 56), but the internal conflicts accompanied him played as an initial obstacle that stood in his way to fulfill his war dream which firstly led to an escape and ultimately to a war-hero figure, after his evolutionary stages were acquired, he was finally able to defeat his fear and cowardice in the face of the horrifying war. Fleming is regarded as a war hero for defeating both; his fears and enemies simultaneously. (Green, 2020).

IV. CONCLUSION

The psychological and emotional costs of war remain at the forefront of analysis in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*. Notwithstanding the fact that they share a common thematic territory of horrors of a battlefield, yet they are significantly sub-divided in tone and narrative structure, and philosophies of escapism, heroism and the meaning of war.

In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut critiques the traditional notion of heroism, drawing a protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, who is basically inactive and disconnected from the real

events of war. Billy's escapism whether through his time travels or through his constant encounters with the Tralfamadorians mirrors his endeavor to emotionally detach himself from the unpleasantness and horror of war. The novel deals with escapism as a coping mechanism, a means to endure the futility and meaninglessness of war, yet it eventually highlights the pointless efforts of trying to escape the psychological trauma that war actually leaves behind. Billy's personal journey on the inventive imaginary world, which he creates, is a quest of detachment where he becomes a viewer of his own life, unable to modify or influence his destiny in the real world. In this sense, Vonnegut proposes that heroism as a traditional notion is an illusion in the face of an indifferent, intolerable and uncontrollable universe.

In contrast, *The Red Badge of Courage* takes a more humanistic approach to heroism, focusing on the internal transformation of Henry Fleming. Unlike Billy Pilgrim's passive survival, Henry's heroism emerges from his personal growth and confrontation with his own fear and shame. In this novel, heroism is not about grand gestures or external validation; instead, it is about endurance and moral reconciliation in the face of war's traumatic realities. The novel's treatment of escapism is much more psychological and internal. Henry attempts to escape the terror of battle, but ultimately, his heroism arises from confronting his inner demons and accepting the complexity of human emotions in the midst of war.

Thus, while both novels engage with the psychological toll of war, their treatments of heroism and escapism reflect distinct worldviews. *Slaughterhouse-Five* presents a nihilistic view, where heroism is irrelevant, and escapism serves as a means to cope with the absurdity of war. *The Red Badge of Courage*, on the other hand, suggests that heroism is possible through personal growth and reconciliation with fear, even in a brutal and traumatic environment. The contrast between the two novels emphasizes how different literary perspectives on war can lead to fundamentally different understandings of heroism, survival, and the psychological mechanisms of escapism.

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